

Topsfield Historical Society  
Local Lore Newsletter  
Collection



# Local Lore

Issue 30

## The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

WEB Address (<http://www.topsfieldhistory.org>)

Email: [webmaster@topsfieldhistory.org](mailto:webmaster@topsfieldhistory.org)

P.O. Box 323, Topsfield, Massachusetts 01983



### The Earthquake of 1638

(Sidney Perley, Essex Antiquarian 1897)

Earthquakes are always fearful and impressive but at the time this one occurred people were superstitious as well. On top of this, this was a new unknown world, which but a few years before was said to be associated with the most awful terrors.

Friday, June 1, 1638 was a very clear and beautiful day with a gentle wind from the west. After the settlers had eaten their noon meal, they proceeded to their various labors in the field. Before two o'clock acute ears heard a faint murmur of distant sound which became louder and clearer until everyone heard that which seemed to be the far-a-way rumble of thunder. In a minute or two it increased in volume and sharpness until it resembled the rattling of many

marriages fiercely driven over granite pavements. The people were alarmed and discontinued their labors to discover the source and nature of the sound. Above, the sky was perfectly clear. They became perplexed. Not many moments elapsed however before the earth began to tremble, and terrified they threw down their tools and ran reeling like drunken men with blanched countenances to the first group of people they could find, for men, like animals will flock together when they are afraid. The shaking continued to such an extent that people had to secure some permanent support in order to stand erect.

Not only the mainland, but the islands along the coast were shaken violently and the vessels that rode in the harbors and those sailing without were jostled as though a series of tidal waves had passed under them.

People in their houses were greatly alarmed, for they not only heard the awful sound but felt the trembling of the earth. The houses over them shook to their foundations and it seemed as if

they must collapse. The chimneys, being imperfectly built on the outside of the house, of rough and uneven stones without mortar readily yielded to the general shaking and the tops of many of them fell off, striking on the house or on the ground. The noise of the falling stones and the rattling of pewter platters and dishes upon the shelves seemed the precursor of danger. The first and greatest shock died away and the noise ceased. The people resumed their labors. Half an hour passed, when to their surprise and terror the horrible rumbling and quaking renewed. But it quickly passed, being less violent than the first shock. For twenty days the earth remained in an unquiet condition.

At Newbury a town meeting was being held and during the discussions the sound of the oncoming earthquake burst upon their ears like "a shrill clap of thunder." The building was violently shaken and amazement and fear filled the minds and hearts of the people. After the tumult it had caused had ceased, before proceeding, the assembly voted to make a record of the fact of the earthquake, concluding it, "wherefore taking notice of so great and strange a hand of God's providence, we were desirous of leaving it on record to the view of after ages to the intent that all might take notice of Almighty God and fear his name."

The summers for several years after the earthquake were too cool for the sufficient ripening of corn and other crops, as compared with those of a number of years preceding it. They were subject to unseasonable frosts, and on this account but little of the Indian corn matured. What connection this fact had with the earthquake, if any, is unknown.

For many years afterward it was common for the settlers to compute dates as "so long since the earthquake."

### Upcoming Events

#### The Abolitionists & The Underground Railroad

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 3 PM

Gould Barn



### Kids Corner - Valentine Tidbits

In Wales, wooden love spoons were carved and given as gifts on Valentine's Day. The decoration meant, "You unlock my heart!"

In the Middle Ages, young men and women drew names from a bowl to see who their valentines would be. They would wear these names on their sleeve for one week. Now to wear your heart on the sleeve means that it is easy to know how you are feeling.

In the United States, Esther Howland is given credit for sending the first valentine cards.

In some countries, a young woman may receive a gift of clothing from a young man. If she keeps the gift, it means she will marry him.

In 1902 NECCO made the first conversation hearts - tiny Valentine's Day favorites with messages printed on them. NECCO is the acronym of the New England Confectionery Company.

The United States, Canada, Mexico, United Kingdom, France and Australia all celebrate Valentine's Day.

Parents receive 1 out of every 5 valentines. **Happy Valentine's Day!**

Contributors  
Norm Isler

Editor/Designer  
Anne Barrett

Date	Description	Debit	Credit
1900-01-01	Balance		100.00
1900-01-15	John Doe	50.00	
1900-02-01	John Doe	25.00	
1900-02-15	John Doe	25.00	
1900-03-01	John Doe	25.00	
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1900-11-15	John Doe	25.00	
1900-12-01	John Doe	25.00	
1900-12-15	John Doe	25.00	
1900-12-31	Balance		100.00

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Issue 31

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### Coming to Topsfield Channel 10

The "Farms and Rural Retreats" presentation made by Gretchen Schuler at the Gould Barn on January 11<sup>th</sup>, will be shown on Topsfield's Channel 10 on March 17-19 at 7:30 - 8:30.

The presentation was sponsored by the THS, the Topsfield Historical Commission and the Topsfield Garden club.

In the program Gretchen spoke about the old rural farms and retreats in Topsfield, highlighting their gardens and landscapes.

Gretchen has 20 years experience as a preservation planning consultant and co-authored the Topsfield survey of farms and rural retreats.

A DVD of this presentation will be added to the THS archives.

### Comings & Goings

Joe Iarocci has resigned from the THS Board of Directors because he has moved to the Cape. We thank him for his many years of service to the Society.

Ann Savage has stepped in to fill the vacation Board position. We welcome Ann and look forward to her contributions to the Society.

### Alexander Hamilton Exhibit

*Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America* will be on exhibit at the Hamilton-Wenham Library from March 8 through March 29. Created by the New York Historical Society, this traveling exhibit tells the story of Hamilton's astonishing rise in five short years from an orphaned, 15-year-old West Indies immigrant to George Washington's war time aide, and later, at age 32, Washington's Secretary of the Treasury. Hamilton was a complex and controversial figure - a Revolutionary War patriot and soldier, financial and legal genius, and an ardent opponent of slavery. He was the chief architect of many of the financial, political and legal institutions so familiar to Americans today. Hamilton's pivotal role in providing a foundation for the complex society we live in today will be a revelation for many who view this exhibit.

The Hamilton-Wenham Public Library is sponsoring free programs and other events for the public in connection with the exhibition, including a panel discussion on March 20 with panelists from Salem State, Gordon College and the Woods Hole Sea Education Center. Contact Elizabeth Craig-McCormack at 978-468-5577 X 14 for information, or visit [www.hwlibrary.org](http://www.hwlibrary.org).

### Upcoming Events

**Annual Meeting & Potluck**  
March 10<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 PM

**We Rode Through the Storm**  
John Fox  
April 21<sup>st</sup>, 7:30 PM  
The tumultuous relationship between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams

### Kids Corner - Who Knew?



1. In warm weather, 6th president of the United States John Quincy Adams customarily went skinny-dipping in the Potomac River before dawn.



2. 9th U.S. president William Henry Harrison was inaugurated on a bitterly cold day and gave the longest inauguration speech ever. The new president promptly caught a cold that soon developed into pneumonia. Harrison died exactly one month into his presidential term, the shortest in U.S. history.



3. John Tyler, 10th U.S. president, fathered 15 children (more than any other president)--8 by his first wife, and 7 by his second wife. Tyler was past his seventieth birthday when his 15th child was born.

### Selectmens Office, August 23, 1889

ORDERED: That all DOGS, within the limits of the Town of Topsfield, shall be MUZZLED or restrained from running at large until further notice.

Also ORDERED: That a Warrant be issued to the Constable, who, after 24 hours from this notice, shall KILL all Dogs found unmuzzled or running at large, contrary to this order.

S. D. HOOD,                      Selectmen  
J. H. TOWNE,                      of  
G. F. AVERELL.                      Topsfield

*Topsfield, Aug. 23d., 1889*

Contributors                      Editor/Design  
Norm Isler, Bill Whiting                      Anne Barrett

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records in the field. It emphasizes that data collection should be systematic and consistent across all observations. The researchers note that any variability in the data is likely due to environmental factors or human error during the recording process.

In the second section, the authors describe the methodology used for data analysis. They employed a series of statistical tests to determine the significance of the observed trends. The results indicate a strong correlation between the variables being studied, suggesting a clear relationship between the two factors.

The third section provides a detailed account of the field observations. The researchers observed that the behavior of the subjects varied significantly depending on the time of day and the weather conditions. These observations are crucial for understanding the underlying mechanisms of the phenomenon being studied.

Finally, the authors conclude that the findings of this study have important implications for the field. They suggest that further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of the variables under investigation. The authors also provide recommendations for future studies, including the use of more advanced data collection techniques and larger sample sizes.

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3/06



## March 2006 Annual Meeting

The Society's 112<sup>th</sup> annual meeting was held in the Gould Barn following a delicious potluck supper organized by Linda Bissell. There were reports from the Treasurer, the Gould Barn Committee and the Programs Committee, a review of the past year's accomplishments and disappointments was made with a look at plans for the coming year (see next column). Three proposed by-law changes were discussed and approved which clarified senior member and Investment Advisory Committee classifications and recognized the creation of detailed job descriptions for every officer and committee chair. Elections were then held with the results to be listed on the back of the annual programs listing soon to be issued. Congratulations and thanks to the incoming committee chairs for supporting our Society.

Attendance at the meeting was disappointingly low, with only about 35 members present. Member participation is considered to be the major issue facing not only our society but other similar societies as well. A society such as ours is dependent upon many people giving of their time and talents to accomplish the things that need to be done. Please know that we need your help and we ask you to step up and volunteer to help with one or more of the 14 committees that carry out the charter of the society. We do plan a town-wide membership campaign this spring accompanied by a plan to increase public awareness of the society. You can help by bringing a friend(s) to one of our next meetings that might interest them.

## Accomplishments/Disappointments/ Plans

### Accomplishments

- Winning Roving Archivist Grant
- Obtaining 6 month use of temp & humidity recording equipment for records room evaluation
- Long Range Plan definition and assignment
- Job Description clarification and update
- Placement of two bronze plaque historical markers
- Virtual completion of Capen House renovations within budget
- Town Hall Clock report issued
- Kimball Scholarship awards passed out during 2005 totaling \$15,000; Fund exceeds \$500,000 for first time
- Identification of the Lieutenant Francis Peabody Mill Site

### Disappointments

- Membership level
- Lack of volunteer participation

### Plans

- Promote the Society as an active vibrant part of the Topsfield community
- Attract new members
- Continue the historic marker program
- Continue the effort towards better preservation and access to our historical records
- Create a disaster plan

## "An Evening with Mary Todd Lincoln" Portrayed by Patricia Perry

First taped at the Gould Barn on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, this program will run April 14 -16 at 7:30 on Channel 10. Enjoy the fascination of a conversation with the wife of our 16<sup>th</sup> President, Abraham Lincoln. This dramatic presentation takes you on an historical journey from her girlhood in Lexington, Kentucky to her years in Springfield Illinois, the White House and beyond.

<u>Contributors</u> Norm Isler/Bill Whiting	<u>Editor/Designer</u> Anne Barrett
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## Upcoming Events

**We Rode Through the Storm**  
**John Fox, Prof. Emeritus, Salem State**  
**April 21, 7:30**

The relationship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson

## Antiques Appraisal Day

**Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 10 AM to 3 PM**  
**Hamilton-Wenham Community House**  
**Route 1A, Hamilton**

1 item for \$10.00, 3 items for \$25.00

*Skinner* appraisers **Stuart Whitehurst**, VP, Director of Books and Manuscripts and renowned senior generalist appraiser, and **Sara Wishart**, general appraiser and specialist in silver & European decorative arts, will be verbally appraising antiques, family heirlooms and flea market finds.

*Sponsored by Boston Intercollegiate Alumnae Association of Kappa Kappa Gamma*

**Kid's Corner** - Getting kids to come to school and be on time 116 years ago....

**Article - "A Decoration of Honor"**  
March, 1890 *Common Schools Education*

Among the devices used to encourage attendance and punctuality with the little children is one which differs slightly from the bit of ribbon recently described in this magazine.

In this instance the teacher procured sheets of bright tissue paper in pink and yellow. These were cut into strips about 5 inches long and 3 inches wide. These strips were made into fringe and the fringe crimped. On Friday afternoon, those who had been present every session during the week were allowed to wear a pink tissue strip, rolled to make a plume, and pinned on as a breast knot. Those who had been punctual for the same time wore in the same manner the yellow plumes. Some scholars had won both decorations and they were allowed to wear the two colors pinned on the shoulders as epaulettes. This device is very simple, but the children are pleased and encouraged by it.

The Society will be exhibiting at the Town EXPO 2006 at Proctor School on Saturday April 8 from 10 AM to 2 PM. This is an opportunity to learn more about Topsfield town government and the many volunteer groups and civic organizations.

Date	Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
1/1/20	Opening Balance			100.00
1/5/20	Bank of America	50.00		50.00
1/10/20	Wells Fargo	25.00		25.00
1/15/20	Chase	15.00		10.00
1/20/20	AT&T		30.00	40.00
1/25/20	Verizon		20.00	60.00
1/30/20	Bank of America	30.00		30.00
2/1/20	Wells Fargo	15.00		15.00
2/5/20	Chase	10.00		5.00
2/10/20	AT&T		25.00	30.00
2/15/20	Verizon		15.00	45.00
2/20/20	Bank of America	20.00		25.00
2/25/20	Wells Fargo	10.00		15.00
2/30/20	Chase	5.00		10.00
3/1/20	AT&T		35.00	45.00
3/5/20	Verizon		20.00	65.00
3/10/20	Bank of America	35.00		30.00
3/15/20	Wells Fargo	15.00		15.00
3/20/20	Chase	10.00		5.00
3/25/20	AT&T		30.00	35.00
3/30/20	Verizon		15.00	50.00
3/31/20	Bank of America	25.00		25.00



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4/06



### Thomas Emerson Proctor

Some of our readers have asked about Thomas Emerson Proctor so this brief history is offered.

He was born in Boston on June 27, 1874 and graduated from Harvard College with an A.B. in 1895. Following graduation he initially began studying architecture; however a few years later he moved to Topsfield where, in 1898, he purchased a large farm with its historic old house built for Samuel Bradstreet in 1771, now owned by the Massachusetts Audubon Society overlooking the Ipswich River. He hired a number of Italian workers and under the direction of a Japanese landscape designer laid out the roads, trails and Rockery in what is now the Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary. He built spacious greenhouses and gardens off Perkins Row and by 1929 had added several thousand acres of land until he owned nearly one-third of the town. On his estate he planted a great collection of trees and shrubs from all over the world. At one time he visited Central and South America collecting many unusual flowers and plants from the Amazon. His collection attracted many visitors and it gave him much pleasure. Some of the older residents recall him providing flowers for a number of town events. He was a noted botanist and devoted himself to raising orchids becoming adept in the art of cross-fertilization. He was an active member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society winning a number of medals for exhibits of his flowers and plants.

### *Proctor (continued)*

In 1913 when our historical society's founder George Francis Dow was trying to raise funds for the purchase and renovation of the Parson Capen House Proctor made a generous donation, without which the house might never have been saved. In the early 1930's he offered to build a new grammar school on land he would donate if the town would name the school after him but the town turned down the offer, choosing to take the land and build the school itself. It was ultimately named after him however and is now known as the Proctor School. He never married and died in Topsfield on March 21, 1949.

### Strawberry Festival

Saturday, June 10, 2005 will mark the Society's 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Strawberry Festival, which over the years has developed into a town wide event hosting about 100 crafts and over 30 non profit organizations. This is a great place to Christmas shop for unique gifts and of course have some strawberry shortcake too. **It's fun for the whole family!**

As always, we need volunteers to make this event happen: Friday night hullers, Saturday servers, ticket sales, clean up, to mention some of the tasks. Please help your Society and have fun doing it. If you can spare an hour or so to help please call Chairman Norm Isler at (978) 887 9724.

Contributors \_\_\_\_\_ Editor/Designer \_\_\_\_\_  
Norm Isler/Bill Whiting Anne Barrett

### Upcoming Events

#### Seafaring Ancestors & Family Heritage of John Damrell

Stephanie Meegan  
May 12, 7:30 PM

#### Strawberry Festival

June 10, 10 AM to 4 PM

### Kid's Corner – Thomas Edison

Born: February 11, 1847


Died: October 18, 1931

The phonograph and the motion-picture projector were only a few of Thomas Alva Edison's more than 1,000 inventions. One of the most famous inventors in the history of technology, Edison also created the first industrial research laboratory, in Menlo Park, New Jersey, in 1876.

Thomas Edison created many inventions, but his favorite was the phonograph. While working on improvements to the telegraph and the telephone, Edison figured out a way to record sound on tinfoil-coated cylinders. In 1877, he created a machine with two needles: one for recording and one for playback. When Edison spoke into the mouthpiece, the sound vibrations of his voice would be indented onto the cylinder by the recording needle. What do you think were the first words that Edison spoke into the phonograph?

"Mary had a little lamb" were the first words that Edison recorded on the phonograph and he was amazed when he heard the machine play them back to him. In 1878, Edison established the Edison Speaking Phonograph Company to sell the new machine.

Edison suggested other uses for the phonograph, such as: letter writing and dictation, phonographic books for blind people, a family record (recording family members in their own voices), music boxes and toys, clocks that announce the time, and a connection with the telephone so communications could be recorded.



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### Essex Heritage Area 100 Milestones

The following Topsfield submissions have been selected as four of the 100 Milestones in Heritage Development to be honored by the Essex National Heritage Commission as an integral part of its yearlong 10th Anniversary celebration.

1. Captain Joseph Gould Barn
2. Parson Joseph Capen House
3. Topsfield Town Hall Clock
4. Smith Homestead Marker Project

An official public announcement of the 100 Milestones was made and displayed at the ENHC's 10th anniversary event, Essentially Essex County, Thursday June 1, 2006 in Coolidge Hall at the Topsfield Fairgrounds.

### Fact or Fiction: These Might Be True....

In George Washington's day there were no cameras. One's image was either sculpted or painted. Some paintings of Washington showed him standing behind his desk with one arm behind his back while others showed both legs and both arms. Prices charged by painters were not based on how many people were to be painted but by how many limbs were to be painted. Arms and legs were limbs; therefore painting them would cost the buyer more. Hence the expression, "that'll cost you an arm and a leg."

Ladies wore corsets which would lace up in the front. A proper and dignified woman wore a tightly laced corset - as in "straight laced."

\*\*Left at the Gould Barn - man's red jacket with plaid lining - call 887-9724\*\*

### Filming at the Capen House

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> Florentine Films/Hott Productions, INC filmed a number of scenes inside the Capen House as part of an American Masters production entitled: "Audubon: Drawn From Nature". It will be the story of John James Audubon's life and is being filmed in several locations including Louisiana and Massachusetts and possibly Kentucky. Completion is planned for August this year and it will be shown on PBS television starting in May of 2007. A number of films have been partially shot at the Capen property; including "The Witch Hunt" by Lone Wolf Productions, "Three Sovereigns for Sarah" starring Venessa Redgrave and a BBC production about early America, not to mention our own "Tour of the Capen House" video.

### See the back page for a "Special Supplement" Story

Look for your next newsletter in  
September. Enjoy the Summer!

### Parson Capen House Volunteers Needed

Please consider volunteering to be a docent at the Parson Capen House this summer. The Capen House is open Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, 1:00 - 4:30. Information will be provided to you about the house, and it is a pleasant way to spend an after-noon, while enabling visitors to our area to have the opportunity to enjoy this historic treasure.

Call Pat Rolsma to sign up  
at 978-887-2504.

Contributors Norm Isler/Anne Barrett Editor/Designer Anne Barrett

### Upcoming Events

#### Strawberry Festival

June 10, 10 AM to 4 PM

#### Priscilla Capen Herb Society Afternoon Tea

June 28, 2 PM to 4 PM

#### Priscilla Capen Herb Society Afternoon Tea

July 26, 2 PM to 4 PM

#### Priscilla Capen Herb Society Afternoon Doll Tea

August 23, 2 PM to 4 PM

### Kid's Corner

In 1914 the Red Sox purchased the contract of Babe Ruth for \$8,000 from the Baltimore Orioles. The Orioles had discovered the young Ruth while he was enrolled at St. Mary's School for wayward boys.

With Babe Ruth in his first full season, the Red Sox took the 1915 AL Pennant and went on to face the Philadelphia Phillies in the world series where they won the world championship, and 1916 found the Red Sox becoming the first team to win 4 World Series Championships. They did it again in 1918. Little did they know that would be the last Sox championship in that century.

In 1920, amidst a great uproar, "The Babe" was sold to the NY Yankees for \$100,000. Prior to Ruth leaving Boston, the Red Sox had won five World Series, with Ruth as pitcher in the 1915, 1916, and 1918 teams, whereas the Yankees hadn't even made it to a World Series. That was all about to change. After the sale, the Yankees came to win 26 World Series by the start of the 2004 season, while the Red Sox had been to the Series only four times - and lost each time in seven games. Bad luck, huh?

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for ensuring the integrity and reliability of the data collected. This section also outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze the data, highlighting the challenges faced during the process.

2. The second part of the document provides a detailed overview of the experimental procedures. It describes the setup of the laboratory, the equipment used, and the specific steps followed during the experiments. This section is crucial for understanding the methodology and the potential sources of error in the study.

3. The final part of the document presents the results of the experiments. It includes a series of tables and graphs that illustrate the data collected. The analysis shows that the results are consistent with the theoretical predictions, although there are some deviations that need to be investigated further. The document concludes with a summary of the findings and suggestions for future research.

## Special Supplement - Lieutenant. Francis Peabody's Mill Site

On March 4, 1664 the town of Topsfield voted to give Lt. Francis Peabody permission to build a grist mill, the first mill of record in town, provided "...the mill does stand and grind for the town". Grist is grain, like rye or corn, and grinding it was a necessary step in its preparation as food, very important to the early settlers. The next year (1665) the mill was established somewhere on Pye Brook. It was the "somewhere" that was intriguing and we set out to find its precise location. From clues found in several documents we believe we now know its location which surprised us and may surprise you.

We started with an article in the 1897 Volume 1 issue of the Essex Antiquarian by J H Towne which mentioned that, in addition to the grist mill, in 1671 the town voted that it was willing to have Lt. Peabody set up a saw mill provided it would not do damage to any of the townsmen in their meadows. This mill was built in 1672 at the same site as the earlier grist mill. By 1691 business had increased on account of growth in the surrounding district to the point where there was not a sufficient head of water to run the mills. Peabody was granted the privilege of building a dam across Howlett's Brook a few rods below its parting from Pye, provided he pay satisfactory damages to the adjoining owners by reason of his flowing their meadows. Further records search in Dow's History of Topsfield revealed that damages were received in 1692 by Thomas Dorman and sons who had, in 1690, erected a house within a few rods of the parting of the brook on what is now Boardman Lane. On December 27, 1715 Captain Thomas Baker applied to the courts at Salem for damages due to his meadows being flooded but his claim was not allowed. He renewed his demand and, in 1727, it was agreed that Peabody would pay him eighteen shillings yearly and this sum was paid to the Baker family for more than seventy years. This record of flooding narrowed the mill site search to that section of waterway downstream of the Dorman property.

As an interesting aside, the Dorman house was occupied for several years during the latter part of the eighteenth century by Asahel Smith, and here on July 12, 1771 was born his son Joseph, the father of Joseph Smith the founder of Mormonism. Although replaced in 1875 by the present house its location is well established as 22 Boardman Lane. Pye Brook runs roughly parallel to Boardman Lane but where along the brook was the mill?

In the spring of 2005 when the Boardman Lane home site was being finalized by the Society as a historic location the fact that the area had been flooded led to a search for the dam site and it was found at the end of what was once the mill pond, now only a widened stream.

So where is the mill site? It is just off the Northwest corner of the Route One intersection with Ipswich Road, very near the southern most part of Klock Park. One would never suspect that a mill operated here as there is very little evidence today of its existence; yet it did until about 1875; over a two hundred and twenty year period with one hundred and sixty four of those years in the Peabody family. Part of the reason the location is obscure is that today the dam has been breeched, is heavily overgrown and not easily traversed or even seen. The mill pond, which once extended beyond North Street no longer exists as it once did, having been greatly reduced in size due to the dam breeching.

Until 1736 the Peabody grist mill was the only one in town. In that year Thomas Howlett built a mill on Howlett's Brook, a branch of Pye Brook previously mentioned. Incidentally, the mill stone which functions as a Gould Barn side entrance step came from this site. There are other mill sites in the area documented in old records and one could make quite a study of them given time and interest.

We are indebted to historians George Francis Dow, John H. Towne, D Hamilton Hurd, and unknown map makers for this story.

Norm Isler

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# Local Lore



Issue 35

8/06

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### Canoes in Boston Harbor in 1605 as noted by Samuel de Champlain

Samuel de Champlain, a native of France, soldier and adventurer and afterwards governor in New France, was the first to supply a written description of exploration along the coast of the Massachusetts Bay. His observations were printed in Paris in 1613 and later published as *The Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, translated from the French*, by the Prince Society, Boston in 1880. A brief extraction follows as reprinted in the Society's Historical Collections, Vol XXV which may be of interest; particularly to the kayakers and canoeists amongst us, not to mention local history buffs.

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We anchored near a little island\* and put our canoe with knives and cakes for the savages. From the large number we saw, we concluded that these places were better inhabited than the others we had seen.

After a stay of some two hours for the sake of observing these people, whose canoes are made of birch bark, like those of the Canadians, Souriquois, and Etechemins, we weighed anchor and set sail with a promise of fine weather.

Continuing our course to the west-south-west, we saw numerous islands on one side and the other. Having sailed seven or eight leagues, we anchored near an island\*\* whence we observed many smokes along the shore, and many savages running up to see us. Sieur de Monts sent two or three men in a canoe to them, to whom he gave some knives and paternosters to present to them; with which they were greatly pleased, and danced several times in acknowledgment. We could not ascertain the name of their chief since we did not know their language. All along the shore there is a great deal of land cleared up and planted with Indian corn. The country is very pleasant and agreeable and there is no

(Champlain Cont'd)

lack of fine trees. The canoes of those who live there are made of a single piece, and are liable to turn over if one is not skilful in managing them. We had not before seen any of this kind. They are made in the following manner. After cutting down, at a cost of much labor and time, the largest and tallest tree they can find, by means of stone hatchets (for they have no others except some few which they received from the savages on the coasts of La Cadie, who obtained them in exchange for furs), they remove the bark, and round off the tree except on one side, where they apply fire gradually along its entire length; and sometimes they put red-hot pebble-stones on top. When the fire is too fierce, they extinguish it with a little water, not entirely, but so that the edge of the boat may not be burnt. It being hollowed out as much as they wish, they scrape it all over with stones which they use instead of knives. These stones resemble our musket flints.

\* Thatcher's Island.  
\*\* In Boston Harbor.

### Welcome New Members!

In May the Society conducted a town-wide membership campaign, resulting in 105 new memberships and still counting! We are thrilled!

Special thanks to Ardie Clark, Joyce Bergsten, Dot Bonneau, Norm and Peggy Isler, Ginny Vitale, Polly Croteau, Sarah Barrett and Gretchen Marks for help in folding, stuffing and sticking – we couldn't have done it without you!

Contributors Norm Isler/Anne Barrett Editor/Designer Anne Barrett

### Upcoming Events

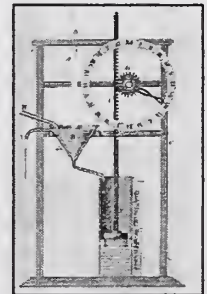
**1920's Home Movies of  
Topsfield**  
September 15, 7:30 PM

**Topsfield & the Civil War**  
Gordon Professor David Goss  
October 6, 7:30 PM

**Halloween Witches' Roost**  
October 29, 2 – 3 PM

### Kid's Corner

The word **clock** was first used in the 14th century. It comes



from the Latin word for **bell** ("clocca").

The oldest type of clock is a sundial clock, first used around 3,500 B.C.. The shadow of the sun pointed to a number on a circular disk that shows the time. This clock didn't work at night.

Around 1400 B.C. water clocks were invented in Egypt (see illustration above). The name for a water clock is clepsydra (pronounced KLEP-suh-druh). A water clock was made of two containers of water, one higher than the other. Water traveled from the higher container to the lower container through a tube connecting the containers. The containers had marks showing the water level, and the marks told the time.

Water clocks were very popular in Greece, and had the advantage of telling the time at night as well as in the daytime.

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# Local Lore

Issue 36

9/06

## The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

WEB Address (<http://www.topsfieldhistory.org>)

Email: [webmaster@topsfieldhistory.org](mailto:webmaster@topsfieldhistory.org)

P.O. Box 323, Topsfield, Massachusetts 01983



### President's Message

We have plenty to look forward to at the Society as Fall approaches but first I'd like to mention some recent past events- some great and some not so great. On the great side is the wonderful response to our membership drive organized by Anne Barrett. Over 88 applications were received covering over 160 new individuals! If every member showed up at our meetings we might have to build another barn! (Just kidding). Seriously, it is truly inspiring to see how many people take an interest in Topsfield's history as evidenced by this response. You can be assured we will try our best to carry out our charter to preserve and communicate history and make it enjoyable to you at the same time.

On the not so great side was the discovery following last July's heavy rains that mold was beginning to form on the leather covers of some of our books. Left unattended this would mean the deterioration, if not the destruction, of irreplaceable volumes. Fortunately quick action was taken by Vice President Jean Busch and Records Chair Amy Coffin and others to define the extent of the problem and take corrective action as recommended by a consultant we had hired through a grant obtained by Director Bill Whiting. An additional dehumidifier was set up in the room and a temperature/humidity sensing system obtained which can record conditions for later downloading. A total cleansing process is now underway and plans are being made for the records room to have more of a climate controlled environment. We are also working closely with the public library to integrate our collection with theirs so as to minimize duplication, make records more accessible and provide them with an improved environment, so that's the good news.

Looking ahead to our October meeting Professor Goss of Gordon College will be presenting Topsfield's Role in the Civil War, an effort by history students at the college with the displays underwritten by the Kimball Fund.

The Society is also working with the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee to create a marker commemorating the railroad's service which began in 1854. This project will be done in conjunction with their development of the first phase of the trail, between Washington and Main Streets.

And finally, I would like to ask you, our members for something; particularly you new members. Our treasurer will not be continuing his duties past next March's annual meeting neither will our Strawberry Festival Chair. Both positions are important to our organization and need new faces. Some computer savvy is important for the treasurer's slot (we can help train some one) and ability to work with a variety of people is a factor for the S/B post. Reason for bringing this up now is to allow plenty of overlap for the new faces. Please take a moment to consider these openings; you'll work with some fine people and have fun doing it. Call Norm Isler at (978) 887 9724 for more details.

*Norm Isler, September 2006*

### **Antique Appraisal Day \* Saturday, October 21, 10 AM to 2 PM**

Five appraisers specializing in jewelry, coins, furniture, china, artwork and glassware will be available at the Emerson Center on the Topsfield Common. \$10 per item or \$25 for 3 items. Proceeds go toward the Topsfield Congregational Church Steeple Campaign and the Joyful Noises Preschool.

### Upcoming Events

#### **Topsfield & the Civil War**

Professor David Goss

Friday, October 6, 7:30 PM

#### **Annual Witches' Roost**

Halloween Party

Sunday, October 29, 2-3 PM

#### **And Now...Mark Twain**

Richard Clark

Friday, November 10, 7:30 PM

### The First Fairy Tale

While we'll never know for sure, some scholars believe that "Cupid and Psyche", written sometime in 100-200 AD, can be considered the first fairy tale. The story is similar in nature to Beauty and the Beast. Two hundred years later, a Hindu collection of tales was written, some of which were believed to be forerunners of later European fairy tales.

Have you ever wondered where the term fairy tale came from? Of course we know the word tale represents a story. The word fairy came from the Latin word "fatum", meaning "to enchant". It also has origins in the French word fee or feerie, meaning "illusion". In French a "fee" was a "woman skilled in magic". Those women were called Fays; they knew about enchantments, charms and the use of stones and herbs for magical purposes. Later Shakespeare was instrumental in the transition to referring to fairies as little beings associated with nymphs and elves.

Contributors

Norm Isler/Anne Barrett

Editor/Designer

Anne Barrett



# Local Lore

Issue 37

10/06

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### The Lost Shipyard

If you look at the back side of Ipswich's Crane Beach in the area known as Fox Creek you would never suspect that a bustling shipyard once stood there near where a few rotting pilings now stand as the only indication of human activity. Over 600 workers were once employed there on three shifts, turning out over 200 ships: submarine chasers, mine sweepers and landing craft during World War II. This is a story that resides in the minds of a few of the older residents and in the archives of the Ipswich Historical Society who gave us access to file material.

According to Anthony Pagano of Melrose, the story of how the William A. Robinson Shipyard came to be begins thousands of miles away from Ipswich, on an island in the South Pacific. Pagano became the unofficial expert on the shipyard after discovering a steamer trunk full of Robinson photographs and newspaper clippings at an estate sale in Melrose. "It's a story of adventure, a love story and, in the end, its kind of a sad story" said Pagano. Robinson was the son of a midwestern newspaper publisher, an avid sailor and adventurer. From 1928 to 1931 he sailed around the world on a 32-foot sailboat, paying his way by selling articles about his travels to magazines and newspapers back in the states. During an extended stay on Tahiti he met Cornelius Crane, Richard Crane's only son who was on an expedition to the South Pacific for the Carnegie Institute. Per Pagano, the two of them hit it right off, with Crane inviting him to visit his family's 59 room summer estate in Ipswich after he completed his trip.

Following a hero's welcome in New York City in November 1931 after more than three years at sea, Robinson traveled to the Crane estate. At a dance in his honor in the grand ballroom he met Florence Crane, Cornelius's younger sister. Two years later they were married in Chicago.

Florence shocked the Chicago high-society crowd when she climbed aboard Robinson's 32 foot sailboat for a honeymoon trip to the Galapagos Islands. The trip was a disaster.

Flash floods caused them to shipwreck in the Panamanian jungle and when they finally reached the chain of islands, Robinson's appendix had burst.

With the help of the Crane family the Department of the Navy dispatched two seaplanes and a destroyer with a team of surgeons and nurses. Robinson was operated on board the destroyer Hale shortly before his ruptured appendix would have killed him.

The couple returned to Ipswich where, soon after his recovery, Robinson began work on a 70-foot ship on the river behind the Crane estate, hiring master shipbuilders who hand crafted every detail. This ship, named the Swift, was called the most beautiful ship of its size at that time and was later bought by a Hollywood producer who used in it several films. During the next several years Robinson continued to produce elaborate ships in his yard.

As World War II approached the Crane's wealth and influence helped Robinson obtain some of the first government shipbuilding contracts. The area around the marsh was cleared and buildings erected to house drafting lofts and specialty manufacturing shops. The state and town financed dredging of the channel to allow large ships to bring in supplies. Although the yard was kept low key for security reasons some of the residents said you could hear the sounds of the shipyard day and night. Experienced shipbuilders from Gloucester and Essex, men and women from Lawrence and Haverhill answered newspaper ads for work on one of the three shifts that kept the yard going 24 hours a day. They managed to build over 200 ships during the war.

Robinson's marriage to Florence began to sour and he obtained release from his contract with the government to build more ships so that he could return to Tahiti where he lived until his death in 1988. The divorce was bitter and within a few years the shipyard was totally bulldozed to erase any trace that it, or Robinson, ever existed.

*Story Courtesy of the Ipswich Historical Society*

### Upcoming Events

**And Now...Mark Twain**

Richard Clark

November 10<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM

**Annual Thanksgiving Open House**

November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 10-12

**Annual Holiday Party (members)**

December 10<sup>th</sup>, 3:00 PM

*A Message from:*

**TOPSFIELD**

**MAIN STREET FOUNDATION**

*PARTNERS FOR A VITAL COMMUNITY*

Who erected the new "Welcome to Topsfield" sign? The Topsfield Main Street Foundation initiated this project, partnering with town departments and local businesses to raise funds and erect the sign identifying the entryway to Topsfield's downtown. The TMSF also added the banners, benches, barrels and planters along Main Street to help make the downtown more inviting.

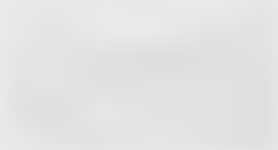
The Topsfield Main Street Foundation is a non-profit organization, not a town committee, incorporated in 2001 and a member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We are residents and volunteers dedicated to preserving our Town's unique historic character and natural resources through a partnership with local government, businesses and the community at large. There's a lot more that can be done to beautify the downtown through improvements in streetscape, building facades, signage and landscaping, among other future projects. Later this fall, TMSF will send out an appeal to residents for their support of our current and future projects. As members of the Topsfield Historical Society, we welcome your insight, help and suggestions for ways to enhance and strengthen Topsfield! For more information, please visit the town's website and link to TMSF or call Janet Kmetz (978) 887-3271.

Contributors

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Editor/Designer

Anne Barrett



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# Local Lore

Issue 38

11/09

## The Topsfield Historical Society Newsletter

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### The Parson Capen House in the Great War

During the summer of 1914 there came to the Capen House a man who was so taken with its beauty and charm that he came there to live. Like the Parson he was a son of Harvard. Henry Beston Sheahan had also lived in France and loved the land and its people. War burst upon Europe and France called to her aid all those who loved liberty and honor. Months passed by and soon Beston was in France, the first volunteer in the American Ambulance Corps and there, at Bois le Pretre and Verdun, he served France and civilization for nine months. Meanwhile the Capen House often sheltered the women of the town as they worked for the French wounded and its huge fireplaces warmed the busy fingers that wrought the supplies needed by the soldiers in the trenches and the figures lying on the white cots. The dweller in the manse returned. Another summer passed and once more the dweller sailed away; this time at the direction of the Secretary of the Navy to learn the story of the fleets on foreign service. It was his to share the life of the guardians of the sea, to patrol both above and below the waters, and to witness the tragic end of a German submarine. Safely home again he told the story that the deeds of his countrymen might not be forgotten. And so the spirit of Parson Capen, who bravely opposed superstition in the fearful days of 1692, again came into a struggling world and his old home was glad.

Editor's note: Henry Beston Sheahan was a noted author of his day and lived both in Topsfield and on Cape Cod. The above story is reprinted from the Historical Society's Collection Vol XXIII, published in 1918.

### Aviation History in Massachusetts

Did you know where and when the first airplane flew in Massachusetts and who flew it? It was on February 28, 1910 when Augustus M. Herring took off from the frozen surface of Lake Chebacco on the Hamilton Essex line in a pusher biplane designed and built by him and W. Starling Burgess. It was their first design. Earlier Herring had been involved with Octave Chanute (considered to be the father of US aviation) in glider tests at Indiana Dunes located at the southern end of Lake Michigan. Burgess was a successful Marblehead yacht designer who became interested in human flight. He formed a company in 1910 and, between then and 1918, built almost 100 planes, many of them seaplanes with the US Navy being one of his major customers. After that first flight Burgess sold the airplane and moved his operation to Plum Island about a mile south of the present entrance to the Parker River Wildlife Sanctuary where he built a building and a wooden runway. One of his most successful designs was the Burgess-Dunne, the world's first flying wing designed to operate from both land and water. Both the US Navy and the Canadian military purchased this model. His workman-ship so impressed Wilbur and Orville Wright that they licensed him to build their Wright Model B airplane. After leaving the Burgess Company he returned to yacht building and, in the 1930's designed and built 3 different America's cup winners.

Host for the Chebacco Lake flight was Norman Prince, son of a wealthy New Hampshire family who later formed the famed Lafayette Escadrille, the corps of American flyers who fought for France before the US entered World War I. He later died coming back from a mission.

For further information about early aviation history in New England you might like to visit a small museum at the Plum Island airstrip, now known as the Plum Island Community Airfield.

### Upcoming Events

#### *Holiday Party!*

(members only)

**December 10<sup>th</sup>, 3 PM**

Please bring an appetizer

#### **The Big Bands**

**Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey...**

**Speaker: Mel Simons**

**January 14<sup>th</sup>, 3 PM**

### Holiday House Tour

**December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2 - 5 PM**

Sponsored by the Congregational Church of Topsfield to raise funds for the Meetinghouse Steeple Restoration Project.

The following Topsfield homes, including examples of Colonial, Victorian and Contemporary architecture, will be on display, beautifully decorated for the Holidays....

**104 Main Street**

**18 Prospect Street**

**9 River Road**

**15 River Road**

**85 Parsonage Lane**

**167 Haverhill Street**

Tickets are \$15 and are available by calling 978-887-2101, and will also be sold the day of the tour at the Emerson Center on Topsfield Common.

## *Happy Holidays!*

Contributors                      Editor/Designer  
Norm Isler/Anne Barrett      Anne Barrett



# Local Lore

Issue 39

12106

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### Rogers Rangers

Robert Rogers was a colonial farmer recruited from New Hampshire in 1755 by the British for service in the French and Indian War (1754-63).

He created a unit called Rogers' Rangers in 1756 (the first Rangers), and by 1758 the British placed him in charge of all colonial Ranger companies. The Rangers wore distinctive green outfits and developed tactics called "Rogers' Ranging Rules", which the British considered unconventional. These tactics are still in use by Rangers today, including the Green Berets.

Rogers' Rangers were most famous for their engagement with the Abenaki St Francis Indians, who lived midway between Montreal and Quebec. These Abenaki were credited with the deaths of over 600 colonists during the duration of the war. After the Indians attacked a retreating British unit under a flag of truce, Rogers led a hand-picked force of 200 Rangers to destroy the Indian's village.

Rogers' Rangers took part in General James Wolfe's expedition against Quebec and in the Montreal campaign of 1760. The Rangers were later sent by General Jeffrey Amherst to take possession of the northwestern posts, including Detroit. In 1763 the Rangers were in the West again, during Pontiac's War (1763-64), and they participated in the Battle of Bloody Bridge Lexington.

Contributors Norm Isler/Anne Barrett Editor/Designer Anne Barrett

After the war, Rogers went to England to write of his accounts. In 1766 he asked King George III to fund an expedition from the Mississippi River to the Pacific. The King refused, but granted him command of the northwest post called Michilimackinac. From there, Rogers conducted his own expedition anyway. His ambition caused him to be sent to England on the charges of treason, but he was acquitted. Historians believe the spark of the American Revolution may have begun in the ranks of Rogers' Rangers. One of America's best officers during the Revolution was John Stark, who had been Rogers' Lieutenant. The British had treated the Rangers poorly during the French and Indian War. In 1775 former members of Rogers' Rangers fired upon the British at Concord and Rogers returned to America to join the Revolution when it started. George Washington refused his offer of help, because he feared that Rogers might be a loyalist spy. Outraged by this, Rogers openly joined the British and organized and commanded the Queen's Rangers, which saw service in areas around New York City, and later created the King's Rangers.

### Towne Family Reunion Sept. 13-15, 2007

Descendents of William & Joanna Blessing Towne, including lines of Barton, Bowden, Cummings, Estey, Gould, Havens, Nurse/Nourse, Perkins, will meet for the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion at the Peabody Marriott. For information contact Wayne Riggle, 2303 Appalachian Blvd. Arden, NC 28704 or email [rigglew@bellsouth.net](mailto:rigglew@bellsouth.net). Membership info contact [ytowne@cas.washington.edu](mailto:ytowne@cas.washington.edu).

### Upcoming Events

#### The Big Bands

Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey...

Speaker: Mel Simons  
January 14<sup>th</sup>, 3 PM

#### Dr. Anthony Patton

February 11<sup>th</sup>, 3 PM

### Kid's Corner

January 6 is known on the Christian calendar as Epiphany, also called the "Twelfth Night" being the 12th Day of Christmas. It signifies the event of the Magi, or Wise Men visiting baby Jesus.

The "12 Days of Christmas" start with Christmas and end with Epiphany, sometimes called Christmastide. The "season" of Epiphany lasts from January 6 through the day before Lent.

Epiphany is a Greek word that means manifestation, appearance, or showing forth. Epiphany began in the eastern Church as the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. As the celebration of Christmas spread eastward, Epiphany changed to its present meaning. Indeed, the Church of Rome had, by the year 354, separated out the commemoration of Christ's Birth from Epiphany and transferred it to December 25.

We rarely hear of the 12 Days of Christmas any more, except by way of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" play, or the words to the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

See the other side of this newsletter for more Society news.

